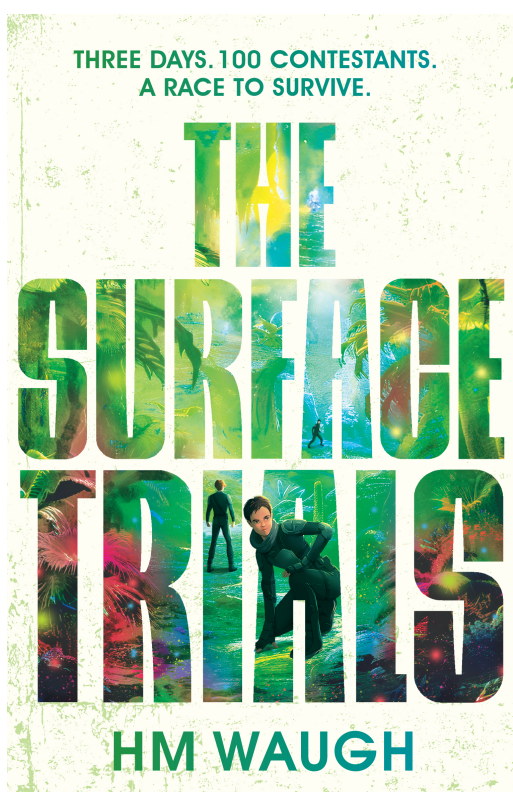


The Surface Trials

by HM Waugh



An epic page-turner full of twists you won't see coming, set on an alien planet where, under the watch of a galaxy-wide TV audience, Ammy Antares and her fellow competitors must complete a challenging quest to gain entry into an elite interplanetary academy.

RECOMMENDED FOR

10-14 (Upper Primary and Lower Secondary)

THEMES

space, reality TV, STEAM, STEM, alien planet, aliens, adventure, survival, quest, competition, science-fiction

ISBN (AUS)

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SYNOPSIS

For Amethyst Antares, Starquest Academy offers an escape from the prison of her home planet. For Rian – the uber-famous and expertly disguised heir to the universe's two greatest dynasties – failure to get into his own academy is not an option. And Deneb? Well, he's an outlier...

But this year not everything goes to plan, and Amethyst and her squad find themselves playing for more than Starquest admission. To survive, they'll have to outsmart carnivorous creatures, share dangerous secrets, maintain trust and embrace the most shocking truth in the galaxy.

Set on a fascinating yet hostile alien planet, this pulse-pounding, high-stakes, elimination-quest novel will have readers on the edge of their seats.

AUTHOR MOTIVATION

'The Surface Trials first appeared as an idea during a workshop where I show kids a slide of twenty things I love or find interesting and then have fun combining four or five into two different ideas. I like to show the students how one framework can turn into multiple story ideas, before they try it themselves. But I also like a challenge, so I try to mix different prompts together every time I present the workshop. Sometimes I REALLY like an idea I come up with, so I write it down. And this idea was one such. I kept tossing it around and thinking about how it could work, and eventually it all came together. I realised I had something I wanted to dive into.

'The planet where the Trials take place was inspired by two very different things. Firstly, how Minecraft biomes change so dramatically, making each world super interesting to explore. I just love a story that has me exploring an unknown world, and I also wanted a world someone like my daughter would like. She is very clever with Minecraft, and at the time was creating special places for me to explore filled with things she thought would scare

me. Like dark rooms filled with spiders, and roller-coasters accessed from stupidly high glass-floored platforms that I almost fell off because I didn't want to look down.

'The second aspect I added to my world came from the amazing diversity of carnivorous plants where I live. Our ancient soils mean a lot of plants have adapted to gain extra nutrients from catching tiny animals. And one day I thought... what it would be like if those plants were big enough to catch people? And, of course, this then led to a suite of alien animals resembling giant insects, as well as a whole pile of ideas of how both the hungry plants and the armoured creatures could make life tough for my characters.'

HM Waugh

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



HM Waugh is a children's author, educator and environmental scientist with a long-term love of wild places and outdoor adventures. She has been kidnapped twice, handled dragons for a job, and dreams of one day blasting into space. Her books mix humour, danger and friendship with a dash of science and imagination.

IN-CLASS DISCUSSIONS AND ACTIVITIES

Before Reading

- Discuss how the different elements on the cover – images of people and plants, colours, use of all caps, a sans serif font and progressive scaling (ie THE SURFACE TRIALS) – work to reinforce the book's tagline: THREE DAYS. 100 CONTESTANTS. A RACE TO SURVIVE.

Prologue

- A book's prologue provides important background information before the main story begins. With this in mind, do you consider the letter addressed to Amethyst Antares that appears before Chapter 1 a prologue? Make a list of all the background information the letter provided. Make sure you include the year the book is set, the purpose of Starquest Academy, information about Amethyst and her home planet.

Genre

- What genre would you expect this book to be, based on the book's cover, back cover blurb and prologue? Would you describe this genre as popular in modern culture? Why do you think this is so?

Chapter Openers

- Why do you think the author included the short pieces of advice at the beginning of each chapter? Did they add or detract from the story for you?

The Hero's Journey

- The hero's journey follows a common pattern where the protagonist starts in their normal world, faces a challenge that pushes them into an unfamiliar situation, undergoes trials, and emerges transformed. How does Amethyst's story follow this pattern? Identify key moments that represent important stages, such as her call to adventure (when she is forced into a situation she does not want), her big ordeal or turning point (when she faces a major challenge), and her return or transformation

(when she takes action to change the world around her). How does her journey not only change her but also impact those around her?

Multiple Viewpoints

- Did you like the story being told through Deneb, Rian and Amethyst's eyes in different chapters? Does giving the reader a different viewpoint make the story richer? Did it add to the mystery of Rian's real identity?

Reality TV

- Did the knowledge that she was being watched on TV by millions of people change the way Amethyst behaved during the trials? Do you think it would change how you behaved if you were on a reality TV show? Did the book make you want to watch more reality TV? Why?

Make a Prediction

- What do you think will happen to the squad once they arrive at Starquest Academy and start training to become planeticians?

ACTIVITIES

Clue 1

- Amethyst's squad must solve a riddle featuring anagrams in Chapter 8. Anagrams are a word or phrase made by rearranging letters. Follow these simple steps to unscrambling anagrams:
 - Look for common letter pairs (TH, ING).
 - Find prefixes or suffixes (UN-, -ED).
 - Identify vowels and their positions.
 - Break the word into smaller parts.
 - Rearrange letters in different ways.

Now see if you can unscramble these anagrams: atco, esuoh, rdifen, nedarg.

[Answers are coat, house, friend, garden]

- **Make Your Own Compass:** Amethyst's squad makes a compass with a few simple objects and so can you! Like the squad, you'll need a metal needle, a bowl of water, a magnet and a leaf. Make the compass in four simple steps:
 1. Rub the needle on the magnet 20–30 times in one direction.
 2. Place the needle on the leaf.
 3. Float the leaf on the water.
 4. Watch as the needle slowly turns to point north!

- **Design Your Own Survival Gear!**

Stranded on an alien planet or lost in the wild, survival can depend on one smart invention. Now it's *your* turn to get creative – just like Amethyst's squad!

Choose a piece of survival gear and design it using natural and commonly found items like plastic bottles, glass jars, leaves, string, or sand. Think water filters, fire starters, fishing rods, shelter frames, sundials, or evaporative kits.

You're not just making something cool – you're making something that could save your life!

1. **Choose your survival need**

Clean water? Warmth? Food? Shelter? Timekeeping? You decide!

2. **Explain why this piece of gear is essential**

Why is this the most important tool for survival?

What would happen if you didn't have it?

3. **Find your materials**

Look around – what's reusable, recyclable, or natural?

Ideas: plastic bottle, charcoal, gravel, wire, leaves, string, sticks, glass, foil...

4. **Sketch & plan**

Draw your invention with labels showing what it's made from.

Explain how it works in 2–3 simple steps.

Clue 2

- The second clue the squad must solve is a shopping list cipher. Follow the squad's instructions and see if you can decipher the following:

6 carrots

3 rhubarbs

2 broccolis

9 cucumbrines

4 kohlrabis

2 kevelbeans

6 cauliflowers

3 potatoes

[Answer: TURN LEFT]

Clue 3

- The third clue in the novel is another cipher. This time every second letter spells the name of the planet the squad is on. Once they remove the planet's name the instruction becomes clear. Solve the following cipher but note every second letter spells the word Earth. [And the 3, 1 and 2 found in A3R1T2H are actual numerals.]

TEA AKRET BHUES A3R1T2H

[Answer: TAKE BUS 312]

Now see if you can create a similar cipher by including your name in an instruction.